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TRAMP TRIP IN THE ROCKIES

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Isabel Bailey
with kind regards
of the author.

A Tramp Trip

in the

Rockies

of

Colorado and Wyoming

by

S. W. S. Franklin

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1903

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A TRAMP TRIP IN THE ROCKIES

"Points and ridges rising, beautifully red,
from immense fields of snow."

Printed to illuminate a promise

W. L. J.

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Introduction

AN APPRECIATION

AFTER EIGHT YEARS

Prairie born;
Once his feet touch the slope of Western mountain
The level road they ever more shall spurn.
If once he drink from snow-pure crystal fountain
His thirst shall, ever more consuming, burn
With deepened draughts from common stream.

Once his eye catch glimpse of more substantial glory
Than prairie horizon high piled with clouded foam
His quickened yearning shall inspire old story
Of unbounded, deathless realms beyond the sunset — Home!

U. of P., Nov. 29th.

My dear Mr. S.:

Your good letter was received this afternoon, just as I was getting ready to take my sister, who is at Bryn Mawr, as you know, to the Army-Navy foot-ball game. I must confess that it was with somewhat of a pang that I contemplated the fact of its probably being the last time I would see a great foot-ball game from the viewpoint of a student. The greater part of my view of life's great game itself has been through the eyes of a student — eight years of college work

with two years of "hustling" sandwiched in between—and I sometimes wonder what I value most in this education I have been so long in getting. I believe it is, chiefly, the ability I have acquired to do things, and above all, the training which has developed the little I have of self-reliance and determination. My first and greatest lesson of this kind was our Colorado-Wyoming trip. From the time our pack horse ran away * the first night out from Loveland, until we had done with that last weary day when we recrossed North Park, it was for us to do or bust!

* An incident omitted by S. in his following story of the trip.

Since our trip eight years ago I have spent three summer vacations in the mountains. First, a botanical expedition through the Big Horn Mountains; second, a purely wanton trip like our own through the northern end of the Medicine Bow Mountains, and third, an extensive trip with one companion through the Uintah Forest Reserve in the interest of the U. S. Dep't of Agrl.

On this last trip we started from Kamas, Utah, and followed the northern slope of the Uintah Mountains to Burnt Fork, Wyoming; from here we followed the old Fort Thornberg trail across the range to Vernal, Utah;

thence across country to the White Rock Indian Agency; and from there along the southern slope of the range to our starting place, Kamas. On this trip we were well-equipped with riding and pack horses, but you will appreciate the difficulties we encountered when I tell you that on the greater portion of the journey we had absolutely no trail to follow. The Uintah range has no peaks comparable to Long's Peak, in the Front Range of Colorado, but it is, on the whole, the most rugged and forbidding range of mountains I have ever seen, especially on its southern desert slope, which is almost entirely devoid

of vegetation. This southern slope of the Uintah Mountains is one of the hottest deserts in this country, and for five consecutive days of travel we were away from water for periods of from five to fifteen hours, our thermometer rising to 126° F.

[D's description of this southern slope of the Uintah range reminds the writer of what his friend 'Gric (see page 34) told him nearly ten years ago of the desolate Funeral Mountains bordering Death Valley in southern California. Nothing can more powerfully seize the imagination of one who is foot-sore and hungry than trustworthy news of those dreadful Mountains and of that awful Valley.]

U. of P., Dec. 13.

My dear Mr. S.:

You will see by the heading of the former letter, which I enclose herewith, that it has been somewhat delayed. Before I had quite finished, I received a message asking me to come at once and take temporary charge of the medical wards at the M. Hospital in place of the resident physician who had been called away by a death in his family. It is pretty hard to get into a hospital in any case and it is not often that an undergraduate has the good fortune to be

put in charge of two wards in a big Philadelphia Hospital. I was nearly scared to death the first night but the next morning I recovered my self-possession and I guess that I made a go of it. At any rate I am told that I am to have another try at it in January.

By the way, you will be interested to know that I have the promise of a good place on the research staff of the Rockefeller Institute in connection with some specially urgent work to be undertaken next summer.

Since seeing you last spring I have followed your suggestion and have dug pretty carefully through Pear-

son's "Grammar of Science" and a pile of Huxley's writings.

Very sincerely yours,

D.

THE TRIP

"God's people have come"

There were two of us, a prairie-born tenderfoot in the person of a sixteen-year-old college sophomore and the writer. We hurried off before the close of the college term, leaving the prairies of Iowa, to spend a short vacation in the mountains, reaching Denver on a cloudless morning, the sixteenth of June. In Denver we made a few small purchases of fishing tackle and ammunition, and sat for several hours on the top of Capitol Hill:—

"This is the land that the sunset washes,
Those are the Banks of the Yellow Sea
Where it arose, and whither it rushes
This is the western mystery."

Late in the evening we took the train for Loveland from which place we were to start on a tramp to Laramie, up in Wyoming.

In Loveland we purchased a pony and a pack-saddle. The pony had never been broken to the saddle, and inasmuch as the art of packing has always to be learned anew when one has not practiced it for several years, both of us were, in some respects, as green as the pony and naturally somewhat nervous when we started from Loveland. The pony served us well however and at the worst only gave us a name for the Bucking Horse Pass when

we crossed the range of the Medicine Bow Mountains from the waters of the Grand River to those of the North Platte.

From Loveland we reached Sprague's Ranch in Estes Park, thirty-five miles away, in two days of easy travel over a good stage road, encountering a snow squall in the high foot hills which left us cold and wet at sundown of the first day. In Estes Park we stayed three days, fishing, running up to timber line as preliminary exercise, and writing letters. The writer had spent two previous summers in Estes Park near Sprague's Ranch in company

with friends from the University of Kansas.

CAMP ACCLIMATIZATION,
NEAR MORAINE P. O.,
June 21st.

My dear little Friend:—

D. and I reached this place day before yesterday. I saw Fred Sprague yesterday. He had already learned of our presence in the Park, having seen our tracks (hob-nails), and, as his mother tells me, he remarked upon seeing them that "God's people had come," meaning the Kansas boys with whom he became acquainted in '86 and '89.

We have passed thousands of flowers since leaving Loveland, white poppies, cactus, blue bells, columbine and others more than I can tell. The blue bells are of the same kind that you and I found near Bloomington several weeks ago. It would be very nice if you and I could make our Saturday excursions in this country.

I wish I could tell you more of our trip. Of course it is scarcely begun as yet, but I know pretty well that it will be hard, for one thing, and lonesome, but strangely fascinating. We are beginning already to have that attitude toward nature which I im-

agine Indians have, namely, the desire to get something to eat out of everything we see. [M. had written her brother D. at Moraine P. O. of the pies and cakes they were making at home.] This is by no means greediness, for a measured appetite is essentially incompatible with the conditions of Indian life. In fact the only wild animals which are not gourmands on occasion are those which eat grass. Of course, we are at best only Agency Indians, but we shall soon be off our reservation.

I sometimes think that the impressions I have received when returning to eastern Kansas from this stern

and desolate region must be much the same as an Indian might feel when, after a hard and hungry trip through the mountains, he reached the plains to find them packed with buffaloes!

I hope that the map with the accompanying description will help you to a knowledge of the geography and geology of this country. I send kind regards to your papa and mama.

Your friend, S.

Starting from Estes Park for the Grand River country we stopped over night at *Camp Desolation* in Windy Gulch, an enormous amphi-

theater rising above timber line on the north, east, and west, and opening to the south into Big Thompson Canyon. The mouth of the Gulch is dammed by the lateral moraine of an ancient Thompson glacier and behind this dam is a level, marshy stretch with a few green spruce and thickets of aspen, black alder and mountain willow. Near timber line also is a scattered fringe of green with dots of white, all else is a desolate stretch of burned timber.

Trailing to the head of Windy Gulch in the morning we gained the summit of Thompson Ridge which we followed in a northwesterly di-

rection for about twelve miles; then we circled around the head of Big Thompson river and went down to Camp at the head of the Cache la Poudre river, precisely on the Continental Divide in Milner Pass about two hundred feet below timber line with Specimen Mountain immediately to the north of us.

SPECIMEN MOUNTAIN CAMP,
June 24th.

My dear B:—

D. and I are going to run down to Grand Lake P. O. to-morrow for bacon and flour so I write this to-day. I have been in camp all morn-

ing cooking and mending while D. has been looking for sheep up in the crater of Specimen Mountain. He saw two and shot without effect. Specimen Mountain is an extinct volcano and sheep come to the crater to lick. I have seen as many as a hundred and fifty sheep there at different times during the four trips that I have made to this region, but I have hunted them only one day (the first) of the twenty-five that I have spent in this camp — without success, of course.

Flowers in profusion are found at these altitudes already where the melting snow has exposed the ground

to the warm June sun, but under the drifts it is yet the dead of winter. As the season advances the snow drifts recede and the newly uncovered ground passes with exuberant haste through a cycle of spring. It is this endless renewal of spring which strikes the mountain tourist in the late summer.

We came over from Estes Park yesterday and the day before. At one point I carried the horse's pack about a quarter of a mile on account of steepness of trail and depth of snow, leaving the pony under D's guidance to wallow through as best she could. We shall, no doubt, have

some hard work getting out of the Grand River valley to the north over the Medicine Bow but we intend to keep at it. We are, of course, likely to get cold and wet, tired and hungry. In fact, I am neither very dry nor very warm now as I write, for it is half snowing and half raining; nor hungry (?) for I have just eaten three slices of bacon, half a corn cake eight inches in diameter and an inch thick, with bacon gravy made with flour and water, and nearly a quart of strong coffee of syrupy sweetness. I do wish D. had killed that sheep this morning! We hope to get some trout to-morrow out of Grand

River, but to see the sheets of water which are being shed off the range from rain and melting snow makes one feel uncertain of the trout fishing. I will close for this time and deposit this in my knap sack. To-morrow D. and I will get our "walkins" on bright and early, and pack it to Grand Lake. This is a tough country beyond imagination.

Yours sincerely,

S.

Later: — No trout in Grand River, too, too high.

When trailing above timber line on our way to Specimen Mountain and subsequently we were on snow much of the time; below timber line at high altitudes we contended about equally with snow and fallen timber; and at middle altitudes where the timber is heavy and where fires have been frequent and disastrous the fallen timber alone is quite enough to make travel troublesome. Mud and water, fallen and falling, we encountered everywhere, but without much concern. The chief vexation to the amateur traveler in the Rockies is to slip off a log in trying to cross a stream, and thus get wet all over,

when if one had been reasonable, one might have been wet only to the middle — One of our awkward comrades of '89, nicknamed 'Gric (that is, *Agricola*) after his father, "Farmer" Funston of Kansas, did this perhaps a dozen times and he had grit enough left to take him through Death Valley in southern California, to take him, all alone, 1,600 miles down the Yukon River in an open boat, into the Cuban army, where he received three serious wounds, and finally to take him to and through the Philippines with our Volunteer Army — and the thing which verges most nearly upon discomfort is to sleep in

the rain at snow line; indeed, if it were not for the camp fire this would be distinctly uncomfortable.

From *Specimen Mountain Camp* in Milner Pass we made our way to Grand River over an extremely difficult trail, nearly breaking our pony's leg in the fallen timber, and, finding it impossible to reach Grand Lake by the river trail without wetting our pack, we went into (*Mosquito*) camp and did our week's washing. The next day we left our pony, and made a flying round trip of thirty miles to the settlement. The next morning, hoping to escape the mosquitoes, we moved camp several miles up stream

and in the afternoon we climbed to the summit of one of the high spurs of a nameless * peak in the range of the Medicine Bow. We got back to camp late in the evening in a sharp rain, which continued all night. The morning promised fair weather, and after some hesitation, we packed up for the trip over to North Park. Starting at eight o'clock we reached the deserted mining camp, Lulu, at eleven, having forded Grand River

*A volcanic mass of rugged spurs radiating from a great central core; points and ridges rising, beautifully red, from immense fields of snow. D. and the writer call it Mt. McDonald, but having made no survey, the purely sentimental report which we could send to the map makers in Washington would not suffice as a record there.

seven times, the water of it ice cold and swift as an arrow. We then began to climb the range, the summit of which we reached at three o'clock at the pass of the Bucking Horse far above timber line. At four o'clock we began the descent into the valley of the Michigan fork of the North Platte. The rain, until now fitful, became steady and we, determined to reach a good camping place, kept our pony at a half-trot until eight o'clock, when we found a deserted cabin. We were too impatiently hungry to make biscuit, which we ordinarily baked in the frying pan before cooking our bacon, so we

made our supper of graham mush, bacon, bacon gravy and coffee. Next morning we found to our dismay that our baking powder had been left at the Bucking Horse — and no wonder, for our pack had been strewn for a quarter of a mile along the trail — so we were reduced to mush for breakfast.

GOULD'S RANCH, 15 MILES FROM
HAWORTH P. O., NORTH PARK,
July 7th.

My Dear B:

We have just returned from a week's hunt in the Medicine Bow Mountains east of here. We saw elk, killed a deer, and spent the Fourth of July on a prominent but

nameless peak from which we got a fine view, particularly of North Park and the Rabbit Ear Mountains.

* * * * * *

After breakfast at Camp *Mush*, Mr. E. B. Gould, a neighboring cattle rancher who has no cattle, was attracted by the smoke of our campfire and coming up to see us, invited us to his shanty to eat venison. We went. We have now been with him a week and we are starting on our second carcass.

Gould lives by hunting and trapping, and by odd work in the Park during the haying season. He came to this country years ago with a hunt-

ing party and has been hunting ever since. Several years ago he took up a claim in the extreme southeastern corner of North Park conveniently near to good hunting grounds in the Medicine Bow. He gave up his claim, for good, a year ago, and made an overland trip to New Mexico. That did not satisfy him either, so now he is back in his old shanty again. He thinks we are the toughest-footed "tender-feet" he ever saw. He approves of us, there is no doubt about that, and he has pulled up his stakes to travel with us just for the pleasure of our company! He and D. are both interested in bugs, and

they are both real hunters each according to his experience. Before we fell in with Gould I could persuade D. to wanton exertion in the way of mountain climbing but now I am in the minority and the hunters propose, with a flourish, the scaling of every peak that comes in sight. I think our one climb was prompted largely by Fourth of July feelings on the part of the hunters.

I had a spell of mountain fever just before the Fourth and Gould dosed me with sage brush tea, the vilest concoction I ever had to take.

Gould is not accustomed to walk except when actually hunting, so he

has a riding horse, and a trusty old pack animal whose minimum name is "G— D— you Jack," and whose maximum name (and load) is indeterminate. Gould is going with us to spend a week in the Range of the Rabbit's Ear, far to the west across North Park. He has an old wagon which, if it holds together, will save D. and me some tedious steps across the desert. We shall pass Haworth P. O. and further on, Walden, the metropolis and supply station of the Park. Yours, S.

LOOKING NORTH ACROSS SPECIMEN MOUNTAIN STONE SLIDE.

From D's Mother.

My precious boy:

I trust you will excuse me for using this paper but I am up stairs, and no one here to bring me any other. They tell me I need not wonder that we do not hear from you and I shall try not to be disappointed if we do not hear for a while. Nevertheless my dear boy, the uncertainty I feel in regard to your safety will make a letter very welcome indeed. Perhaps I would have more courage if I were strong. For five days I have been very uncomfortable. I am sitting up

some today for the first [time] and hope soon to be well as usual.

* * * * * *

We were exceedingly glad to hear from you from Grand Lake. I cannot, however, say that the account of your experience by stone slide * and river have lessened my anxiety. I am writing now, Thursday, in bed. I have been quite poorly again. We shall not look now for a letter from you but hope to see you face to face before many days. May God bless

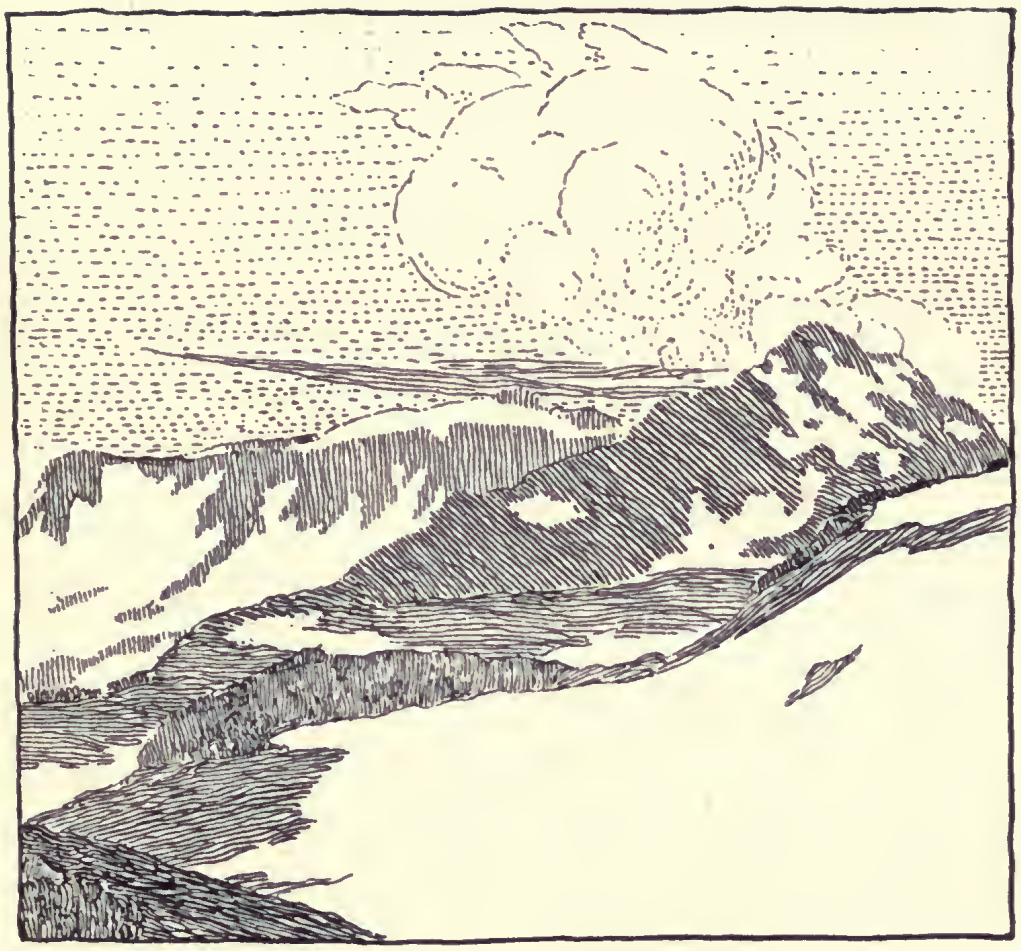
* The crater of Specimen Mountain is worn away on one side by water, and the crater now forms the head of a ragged gulch. Near the head of this gulch is a slope of loose stone, as steep as loose stone can lie, which has a vertical height of 1500 or 2000 feet.

and keep you! Give our love to Mr. S. All join me in tenderest love to you.

Your devoted mother.

At Walden we laid in a fresh supply of flour and bacon, and canned goods, especially canned fruit, to last us while we stayed with the wagon. We then pushed on to the west, striking camp on the West Fork of the North Platte, where we stayed two nights. Here we again tried hard for rainbow trout without success, but we turned off the water from an irrigating ditch and captured a large number of "squaw fish" (suckers).

From *Camp Chew* we made our way well up into the foothills of the Range of the Rabbit's Ear, and then packed our animals, minimum Jack and our pony, and pushed up the range over the worst trail we had yet encountered, through a wilderness of fallen timber. Rain with fog set in as we approached timber line, and, as none of us were very familiar with the trail, although Gould had been over it some years before, we went into camp early to wait for morning. Morning came with fog and rain, and we spent the entire day hunting trail, only to go into camp again towards evening. The next day, however,



IN THE RANGE OF THE RABBIT EAR.

came clear and we made our way over the range, through Frying Pan Meadow, and reached camp down on Elk river towards evening without difficulty. We found good fishing here at last and great numbers of deer but no elk. After three rainy days in *Elk River Camp*, one of which was spent jerking venison of D.'s killing, we packed up and made the return trip over the range in one day of hard travel, going into camp by the shore of a shallow pond well out on the barren level of North Park. The next morning we parted company with Gould, and in two days of hard travel we made sixty stage road miles

across North Park and over the northern portion of the Medicine Bow Mountains to Woods P. O. at the edge of the Laramie plains, twenty-five miles from Laramie.

We had intended walking through to Laramie, but ninety miles and two mountain ranges in three days, not to mention the writer's terribly blistered feet, had temporarily taken some of the ambition out of us, and after some fine diplomacy D. and the writer each found that the other was willing to descend to stage coach riding. We accordingly sold our fine little pony for five dollars, packed our outfit in a compact bundle which we wrapped

NEAR FRYING PAN MEADOW.

in our small tent (the tent had been used for one day as a smoke house for curing venison at *Elk River Camp*), and took the stage for Laramie.

At Laramie we took the train for home, and with eyes eagerly awake and unforgetting, we watched for hundreds of miles an increasing luxuriance of vegetation which terminated in the endlessly and marvelously rich fields of eastern Nebraska and Iowa.

We had been away from home thirty-three days and in the mountains for thirty-one nights—Indians reckon by nights. We had tramped more

than three hundred and fifty miles from Loveland to the edge of the Laramie plains. A large portion of the time was spent at high altitudes where the weather is not lamb-like in June, and no small portion of the three hundred and fifty miles was mud and water, snow and fallen timber, through a country as rough, perhaps, as is to be found anywhere, and as interesting. The only way to study Geography is with the feet! No footless imagination can grasp the sublimity of western Mountain and Plain. Nothing but a degree of hardship can measure their wide-spread chaos and lonely desolation, and only in the freshened

eagerness of many mornings can one perceive their matchless glory.

We reached home weather-beaten almost beyond recognition, but in robust health, especially D., who had actually gained in weight during the trip. From the railroad station we carried our outfit, and venison, two miles to the college grounds, reaching D.'s home about midnight.

Here our madly exuberant spirits were suddenly checked by finding that the illness of D.'s mother had become extremely serious. However she was determined to see us — both * * * *

"We never know how high we are
Till we are called to rise;
And then, if we are true to plan,
Our statures touch the skies.

"The heroism we recite
Would be a daily thing,
Did not ourselves the cubits warp
For fear to be a king."

After four days D.'s mother died. It fell to B. and S. to make a sculptor's plaster mask, and photographs ; and to S. to watch overnight — and hasten to the woods in the morning.

"The bustle in a house
The morning after death
Is solemnest of industries
Enacted upon earth.

"The sweeping up the heart
And putting love away
We shall not want to use again
Until Eternity."

A beautiful Campanile now stands on the college campus erected in memory of D.'s mother by the state of Iowa; and from this memory-tower a chime of bells, placed by D.'s father,

Greets
Those who pass in joy
And those who pass in sorrow;
As we have passed,
Our time.

"Superiority to fate
Is difficult to learn.
'Tis not conferred by any,
But possible to earn
A pittance at a time,
Until, to her surprise,
The soul with strict economy
Subsists till Paradise."